



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

AFRICA AND THE BEGINNINGS OF CHRISTIAN LATIN LITERATURE

REV. PROFESSOR BENJAMIN B. WARFIELD, D.D., LL.D.
Princeton, N. J.

In bringing his sketch of the African provinces to a close, Theodore Mommsen magnifies their significance for the history of Christianity. He represents the part played by Africa in the development of Christianity as very distinctly a leading one. He even seems to intimate that it was in and through Africa that Christianity received its character as a world-religion: it had its origin, no doubt, in Syria, but it was only through the translation in Africa of its sacred books into the popular language of the world-empire that it was given a world-wide mission.¹ There is some exaggeration here; and were the meaning that the universality of Christianity was a contribution to it of North Africa, the exaggeration would be gross. To Christianity, as to the leaven with which its author compared it, expansion belongs as an inherent quality; and the instrumentalities by which its dissemination was accomplished lay at its hand apart from any gift which North Africa could bestow upon it. With far more insight, though without the advantage of writing after the event, the author of the Book of Acts points to its establishment in the imperial city as giving the promise of its extension throughout the world.

Nevertheless, the possibility of such an exaggeration is a striking indication of the great part which was actually played by North Africa in the history of Christianity. In Africa rather than in Rome the roots of Latin Christianity are actually set. It is from African soil, enriched by African intellect, watered by African blood, that the tree of western Christianity has grown up until it has become a resting-place for all the nations of the earth. If we abjure speculation upon what might have been on this or that supposition, and give attention purely to what actually has been and is, we must needs confess that there is a true sense in which North Africa is the mother of us

¹*Römische Geschichte*, Vol. V (2d ed.), p. 657; English translation, Vol. II, p. 373.

all. Christianity is what it is today, in all its fruitful branches at least, because of what North Africa was a millennium and a half ago, and because of what was done and thought and felt there. The very language in which it still defines its doctrines and gives expression to its devotion is of African origin; and the doctrines and aspirations themselves bear ineffaceably impressed upon their very substance the African stamp.

The great part played by North Africa in fixing the type of western Christianity was of course no mysterious accident. It was the natural result of the dominating influence of Africa in the Roman world² throughout the period when Christianity was establishing itself in the West and fitting itself for its world-wide mission. This dominating influence was manifested in every sphere of life and was fairly symbolized by the ascension of sons of Africa to the imperial throne—not merely in such shadows as Didius Julianus and Albinus, Macrinus, Aemilianus, and Memorius, but in a founder of a dynasty like Septimius Severus. The senate is spoken of by Fronto³ as in his day crowded with Africans, and at the same period the consulate appeared almost their peculiar possession.⁴ It was, however, in the domain of the intellectual life that African dominance had become most apparent.⁵ The eagerness with which letters were cultivated in the country of the Atlas, from the earliest days of the settlement of the provinces, is attested by the allusions which Roman writers make to the African taste for books and oratory. Horace tells us⁶ that whenever the first vogue of a poem was over in Rome, the booksellers had but to pack off "the remainders" to Ilerda or Utica; the Spaniard and African took them up with avidity. Similarly Juvenal, despairing of Rome where employment went by favor, advises barristers who had brains to sell, to betake themselves to Gaul, or "rather," says he,

² Cf. Gregorovius, *Hadrian*, English translation, p. 90.

³ *Epist. ad amic.*, ii (p. 201, ed. Naber; p. 214 ed. Niebuhr).

⁴ Cf. Monceaux, *Les Africains*, p. 347.

⁵ "The Roman province of Africa had for centuries taken a leading place in the literature of the imperial period; and from Hadrian to the beginning of the third century it had set the fashion even for Italy."—Norden, in Hinneberg's *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*, volume on "Die griechische und lateinische Literatur und Sprache" (1900), pp. 38 f.

⁶ *Epist.*, i, 20, 13.

to "Africa, that nurse of advocates."⁷ The term he employs may bear a tinge of contempt in it, like Carlyle's "gentleman of the attorney species;" but the fact attested is that the art of speech and the science of pleading were cultivated in Africa with especial zeal and met there with their appropriate reward. Such assiduity in the pursuit of letters could not fail to bear fruit; and after awhile, when Latin literature was languishing in Rome, it was from Africa that new life came flowing in.

There is a somewhat remote sense, indeed, in which Africa may be said to have been midwife to the birth of all Latin literature worthy of the name. It was certainly to the stimulus given to the national life by the Punic wars that the first great impulse to write in Latin must be traced.⁸ But the only direct contribution of Carthage to that flowering of undefiled Latinity—the elegant and even exquisite Terence, whose delicate handling of the language became the model and despair of all subsequent stylists—was of course only one of those remarkable accidents with which the history of letters is filled. Meanwhile this primary impulse, having blossomed in the great republic and fruited in the Augustan age, had in the early years of the Christian era run hopelessly to seed. Rome was once more, so far as literature was concerned, a Greek city; and continued life was infused into specifically Latin literature only by fresh sap flowing in from the provinces. The language of culture in Africa too was at this epoch chiefly Greek.⁹ The extensive compilations of King Juba, whose half-century's reign centers at the birth of Christ, were made in that language. Cornutus, Fronto, Apuleius, Tertullian, the Emperor Severus, all were Greek as well as Latin authors. There is extant even a single piece of Apuleius, composed partly in Greek and partly in Latin. Something similar occurs in the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, which has come down to us in both Greek and Latin, leaving the scholars divided as to which form is original, many holding

⁷ *Sat.*, vii, 147-49: *nutricula caesidicorum Africa*.

⁸ Cf. Simcox, *Latin Literature*, Vol. I, p. 11.

⁹ Monceaux (*Histoire littéraire de l'Afrique chrétienne*, Vol. I, p. 51) would bid us be cautious lest we overstate this. Cf. also Norden, in Hinneberg, as cited, p. 376; and Leclercq, *L'Afrique chrétienne*, Vol. I, pp. 90 f. On the general subject of the use of Greek in the West, see Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity*, etc., Vol. I, pp. 19, 20, n. 1; Vol. II, pp. 380, 381; and for Africa, Vol. II, p. 412.

that both are original,¹⁰ or that parts of the original were in each tongue.¹¹ But the traditions of Greek culture were already slowly dying out in Africa, as indeed this bilingual habit itself testifies. While lettered Rome remained still essentially Greek, a vigorous Latin literature was already growing up at Carthage. It was not yet quite ready, however, to enter upon its wider career.¹²

African rhetors and jurisconsults had begun to invade Rome, no doubt, from the days of the Caesars. Lucius Annaeus Cornutus of Leptis, for example, taught the Stoic philosophy at Rome under Claudius and Nero, and earned the loving admiration of pupils like Lucan, and above all Persius, whose panegyrics of his dear master quite touch the stars.¹³ Shortly afterward his fellow-countryman, the rhetorician Septimius Severus, won equal affection and praise from pupils as well worth having, such as Statius and Martial. He is said to have acquired a perfection in the use of the Latin tongue (as it was spoken in Rome—that “native speech of the Quirites” which Apuleius professes to have found beyond his reach),¹⁴ to which his imperial descendants could never attain. At least Statius declares of the rhetorician that no one would have believed he had drawn his origin from barbarous Leptis or had passed his youth away from the collines of Romulus, and greets him as an Italian of the Italians, to whose appearance and speech, or even mental habits, clung not the least taint of provincial ways.¹⁵ It is recorded of the emperor, on the other hand, that he never learned to speak Latin without a strong Punic accent, and of his sister that, when she came to visit him at Rome, he was constrained to send her back to Leptis because of the mortification her abominable Latinity caused him.¹⁶ Only a little later the place that had been filled by Severus was occupied by another African, P. Annius Florus, a man of apparently indefinitely

¹⁰ Hilgenfeld, von Gebhardt, Harnack (1893).

¹¹ Monceaux, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 83.

¹² Cf. Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa*, Vol. II, pp. 594, 597.

¹³ Cf. Oldsmith, *The Religion of Plutarch*, p. 53.

¹⁴ At the beginning of the *Metamorphoses* (the *Quiritium indigenam sermonem*).

¹⁵ *Sil.*, iv, 5, 45: *Non sermo poenus, non habitus tibi, | Externa non mens: Italus, Italus.*

¹⁶ *Spartianus, Sever.*, 15 and 19.

less genius, but of no less lofty reputation. The combined careers of these celebrated teachers cover the period from Claudius to Hadrian; and meanwhile the Africans had conquered for themselves also the leading place in the more serious study of law. Hadrian's great jurist, Salvius Julianus, the author of "the perpetual edict," was from Hadrumetum; the high tradition which he established was carried on by his pupil, Sextus Caecilius Africanus, likewise an African; while he found no unworthy rival in Pactumeius Clemens from Cirta.¹⁷

All this was, however, but the prelude of what was to come. The real hegemony of Africa in Latin letters begins only in the second third of the second Christian century. It was from Spain, not from Africa, that in the first Christian age new life flowed in to invigorate the languishing stem of Latin literature. Seneca, Lucan, Tacitus, Martial—these are all Spanish names; and the whole literature of the period bears the stamp of the Spanish character. But as the middle of the second century approaches, the supremacy passes finally from Spain, and what to the Roman ear seemed the *stridor punicus*¹⁸ began to fill the world. No name of the first repute, it must be confessed, adorns the annals of secular Latin literature under the sway of African influence; it is a period of literary decay. At the opening of the period the chief writers that meet the eye are Cornelius Fronto, the tutor and friend of Marcus Aurelius, and Sulpitius Apollinaris, the grammarian, about whom gathered a crowd of fellow-Africans, among them perhaps Aulus Gellius himself, while off in Carthage Apuleius was introducing a new genre in literary form. Its single poet worthy of the name, Dracontius, sings the swan-song of the African influence at the end of the period, at the court of the Vandals. Mommsen reproaches it with not having produced throughout the whole of its dominance "a single poet deserving to be remembered,"¹⁹ and its prose tradition was but little higher. The only great poet of the age—Claudian—was, like the African Terence

¹⁷ Cf. Monceaux, *Les Africains*, pp. 74, 345, 346.

¹⁸ The phrase is Jerome's (*Epist.*, 130, 5), but he refers by it to the voice and speech, not to a literary manner. On "African Latin" cf. F. Skotch in Hinneberg, as cited, pp. 433, 434.

¹⁹ *Roman Provinces*, E. T. Vol. II, p. 373.

of an earlier time, one of those happy accidents, sprung from other blood and formed in other molds. The most important prose-writer of the age—Ammonius Marcius—was also Greek in origin. The mass of writers who jostle each other through these years were mostly “schoolmasters turned authors,” over all whose work the “trail of scholasticism” runs; rhetors who, though become writers, still mouthed it in their pages with balanced cadences and elaborately constructed rhythms, in which the sense too often was neglected in straining after effects of sound. It is thus not a very attractive literature which Africa contributed to the secular Latin world. But for a period of at least two centuries it constituted all the Latin literature that existed; and throughout this whole period it not only flourished luxuriantly, but commanded the unbounded admiration of men. To those who lived under its spell it did not suffer in comparison with the literature of the Augustan age itself. Septimius Severus may have made it the reproach of his rival aspirant to the purple (Clodius Albinus, an African like himself—and like Apuleius) that he found in the *Golden Ass* his favorite reading;²⁰ but this suggests an exceptional, perhaps not even an honest, judgment. The men of the time sincerely admired the literature of the time and felt themselves living in the heyday of literary art. Carthage seemed to them to have earned a right to the title of second mother of Latin letters. Even Augustine, with the utmost naïveté, declares that the two cities, Rome and Carthage, stand side by side as sources of the stream of Latin letters.²¹ The bad poets of the day looked upon one another as touching the summit of literary accomplishment. “This at least is certain, Luxorius,” said one to another with charming directness, “you have outdone all the ancients.”²² In one of his delightful letters,²³ Apollinaris Sidonius tells us that, if a manuscript were found lying by a lady’s chair, it was pretty sure to prove to be a treatise on religion; if by a gentleman’s, on eloquence. He adds: “I do not forget that there are some writings of equal literary excellence in both branches,

²⁰ Capitol., *Vita Albini*, 12 (cf. Boisier, *L’Afrique romaine*, p. 241).

²¹ *Ep.*, 118, 9, near end (Migne, XXXIII, 468). Cf. Norden, *Kunstprosa*, Vol. II, 592; Crutwell, *Latin Literature*, p. 546.

²² *Anthologie* (Riese), 87: *certum est, Luxori, priscos te vincere.*

²³ ii, 9; cf. Hodgkin, *Italy and its Invaders*, Ed. 1, 1880, Vol. I, p. 319.

that Augustine may be paired off against Varro, and Prudentius against Horace." Here, to be sure, we are introduced to the great Christian writers who adorned the time; and into their writings a new life had been infused, by virtue of which a really great literature was produced under African influence. But the main point is nevertheless illustrated: the characteristics of the literature of the age were the characteristics of the age, and the men of the age found themselves expressed in it and sincerely admired it.

It was in the midst of this period of African dominance that Christianity began to find a voice for itself in a western tongue. In its earliest stages western Christianity had been Greek. With the single exception of that of the African Victor (188 or 189-99), the names of all the Roman bishops up to the death of Callistus in 223 are Greek. The earliest Christian writers in the West wrote in Greek—Clement, Hermas, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and their contemporaries. The change came so swiftly that it can scarcely be spoken of as a transition, and the change was wrought at the hands of the Africans. Latin Christian literature burst upon the world with the suddenness of a tropical sunrise in the burning tracts of Tertullian. Jerome tells us, to be sure, that before Tertullian, Victor and Apollonius wrote in Latin. Such exceptions, even were they substantiated, would only prove the rule. Jerome, however, seems to be in error as regards Apollonius; and the literary product of Victor, who was himself an African, was in any case insignificant. The learned world was startled a few years ago, it is true, by the suggestion that an interesting tract, *Against Gamblers*, which has been preserved among the works of Cyprian, was really the composition of Victor, and in that case probably the earliest Christian Latin writing which has come down to us. The suggestion has not, however, been verified; the tract seems pretty clearly post-Cyprianic in date, and although its provenience cannot be said to be determined with equal certainty, it may very well be African in origin.²⁴ A much more striking exception would be furnished by the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix, who also was an African, could we suppose it, as many do, to have been produced during the lifetime of Fronto, say about 181 A. D. This

²⁴ Harnack (*Chronologie*, Vol. II, pp. 370-87) now allows its post-Cyprianic origin, but still holds it to be Roman.

much-admired tract is written with all of Fronto's "virtuosity" in the handling of the Latin language, and is crowded with archaisms, bookish allusions to the poets—Vergil, Horace, Lucretius—and reminiscences of the old Greek and Latin Sophists. Its true character is given it, however, by its skill in the new sophistical artifices which characterize all the literature of the African period, and which it never relaxes even in the warmest glow of its Christian indignation. It certainly would fitly enough stand at the head of that series of great but somewhat artificially written Christian writings which are the glory of the Latin literature of the African period, of which it would be an unworthy example only in its somewhat traditional contents and its undeveloped theology. But every internal consideration justifies Jerome's assignment of its origin to a period later than Tertullian.²⁵ In whatever way such questions may be settled, however, in any event the great stream of Christian Latin literature takes its rise in the height of the African influence, and in any event from apparently African-born writers; and thus in any event it must be accounted the gift of Africa to the world. If we see its rise, as apparently we must, in Tertullian, we add merely that this Christian African literature not only rose out of African influences and through African-born agents, but sprang up also on African soil.

From the end of the second century Christianity was the ferment of all cultural and literary development, and the poverty in great names of the secular literature of the period is offset by the richness in them of the Christian literature, from its very origin. For the stream of Christian Latin literature does not begin as a little rivulet which only gradually grows to a river; it bursts out at its source as a great flood. Its earliest examples set for it at once the highest of traditions. Their authors were of course, however, men of their times, imbued with the literary taste of their times. There are exceptions among them, no doubt, as there are exceptions among the secular writers of the period. Lactantius is a shining exception. The noble calmness of his truly classical Latinity knows no rival in the literary product of his day, whether in Christian or heathen circles.²⁶ Hilary of Poitiers is an equally shining exception; and indeed the writers

²⁵ So Massebieau, Monceaux, Neumann, Funk, Harnack.

²⁶ Cf. Norden, *Kunstprosa*, Vol. II, p. 582.

of Aquitaine at large were justly famous for their command of the "Roman speech." No Latin of any age is superior in chaste elegance to that of Hilary at his best.²⁷ But, taken as a whole, the same false taste ruled the great Christian which ruled the small heathen writers of the age. The finically embroidered diction which had been introduced by the Greek Sophists, Gorgias, Hegesias, Himerios—the so-called Asianism or "new rhetoric"—had conquered also the Latin world.²⁸ As it has been pungently expressed,²⁹ the reigning canon of beauty in style had become that "article of faith of all barbarism, that a man must tattoo himself in order to be handsome." Apuleius remains, of course, the supreme example. In him an incredible bombast unites with a painful fastidiousness: alliterations, paronomasiae, assonances, homoioteleuta, balanced clauses, rhythmic terminations, and rhymed endings, simply riot through his pages, in which, as it has been justly said, "a style celebrates its orgies which has degenerated into a mere bacchanalian dance of phonetics."³⁰ But it was not for nothing that the great Christian writers of the African period had all been rhetors before they became theologians, and had received their rhetorical training in the "new style." There is nothing in the way of virtuosity in the use of language in Apuleius which may not, without much searching, be matched in Tertullian. All the fiery impetuosity of that *ardens vir* did not carry him beyond the fashionable artifices; and at his worst—his contemporaries would have said at his best—his style is indistinguishable from that of Apuleius. The same is true, each in his measure, of all the other authors of the period. It is true of Minucius Felix and Cyprian, though of course the graceful elegance native to the one, and the unctious suavity of the other,³¹ modify their use of the rhetorical devices common to all. It is true of Ambrose and of the Gallic writers who adorn the age at a little later time. It is true even of Jerome, whose taste was markedly pure and who knew how to recognize the "Asian tumor" in others, and unsparingly ridiculed the contemporary fashion. Augustine himself, who even in the matter

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 583.

²⁹ By Bernays.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 587.

³⁰ Norden, *loc. cit.*

³¹ *Beatus Cyprianus*, says Cassiodorus, *velut oleum decurrens in omnem suavitatem*. Norden says he is the first Latin writer who has *unction*.

of style towers so much above his age as almost to redeem it, nevertheless never emancipates himself from the traditions of his rhetorical school. In his greater works, where the gravity of the matter absorbs his attention, the wretched artifices, especially word-plays,³² which constitute the signature of the "new style," may retire somewhat into the background. But they are absent from none of his compositions, and in his more popular pieces, where he is most at his ease and is thinking more of the effect he is producing, they obtrude themselves in painful abundance. He knew well enough the beauty of simplicity, but, as he himself would have said, *facilius est errorem definire quam finire*. His pages are studded with such turns of speech as *cetera onerant, non honorant*,³³ *dic "habeo," sed "ab eo,"*³⁴ *o munde immunde*,³⁵ *est enim severitas quasi saeva veritas*.³⁶ If Apuleius can scarcely be opened without exposing the most astonishing examples of elaborate trifling with sequences of sound, and in the matter of balanced clauses and rhyming endings at least—"the sprightly dance of the Asian cola," as it has been called³⁷—Tertullian even surpasses Apuleius, and Augustine will provide us with examples of precisely the same artifices of which we must at least acknowledge that Apuleius and Tertullian might have envied him them. Apuleius may give us such sequences as this:

aut ara floribus redimita,
aut quercus cornibus onerata,
aut fagus pellibus coronata.

Tertullian may provide us with untold numbers such as this:

tot pernicies
quot et species,
tot dolores
quot et colores;³⁸

or, taking a wider sweep, as this:

quam nec nationibus comparaverat,
ne consuetudine deputaretur,

³² Cf. Hoppe, *Syntax und Stil des Tertullians*, p. 149: "Augustine makes use of all the artificial devices which Tertullian employs, and of the 'play on words' in even greater measure than Tertullian."

³³ *Sermo*, 85, 5: *h* is silent in Augustine's mouth.

³⁴ *Sermo*, 94, 14.

³⁵ *Sermo*, 105, 6.

³⁶ *Sermo*, 171, 5.

³⁷ Usener: *der rasche Tanz asianischer Kola*.

³⁸ *Scorp.*, I.

quam absens iudicaret
 ne spatium reus lucretur,
 quam advocata etiam domini virtute damnaverat,
 ne humana sententia videretur.³⁹

But it is Augustine who writes, almost as if by force of habit, thus:

eo nascente superi novo honore claruerunt,
 quo moriente inferi novo timore tremuerunt,
 quo resurgente discipuli novo amore exarserunt,
 quo ascendente coeli novo obsequio patuerunt.⁴⁰

Such flowers of speech, with their elaborate assonance, balance, rhythm, and rhyme, cannot, of course, be transplanted into other tongues. Take, however, only the one item of rhyme, and how would it sound in English prose to be constantly tripping upon passages like this: "When He was born, to heaven a new honor was given; when away he was torn, all hell with new terror was riven; when He arose, the disciples with new love were affected; when He ascended, the angels were to new service subjected"?⁴¹ It strikes us with a shock to observe that the very martyrs in the mines cannot return their thanks for supplies sent by charity to their necessities without lapsing into the literary preciousness of the times.⁴²

Despite their common preoccupation with such rhetorical devices, however, the greatest possible difference in tone and spirit obtains between the heathen and Christian writers of the period. In the

³⁹ *Pud.*, 14 *fin.* Many other examples are given by Hoppe, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

⁴⁰ *Sermo*, 199, 2, *ad fin.* (Migne, XXXVIII, 1028). Norden, *Kunstprosa*, adduces other examples.

⁴¹ English Euphuism (like, no doubt, Spanish Guevaraism before it) which, as Mr. Morley (*English Writers*, Vol. VIII, pp. 316 f.) points out, was "an outcome of the revival of the study of Demosthenes and Cicero, and of the Greek and Latin works upon the art of speaking," can scarcely be looked upon as anything else than a revival of Asianism. John Lyly would not be inaptly described as an English Apuleius; and Dr. Landmann's description of his style would stand very well for a characterization of that of Apuleius: "a peculiar combination of antithesis with alliteration, assonance, rhyme, and play upon words, a love for the conformity and correspondence of parallel sentences, and a tendency to accumulate rhetorical figures, such as climax, the rhetorical question," etc. (*Der Euphuismus*, etc., Giessen, 1881). Some interesting remarks on what may similarly be thought "the Asian rhetoric" in Arabic prose—the so-called *Al Saj'a* or *Al-Badi'a*—may be found in Lady Burton's edition of R. F. Burton's *Arabian Nights*, I, xiv; VI, 338.

⁴² Cyprian's letters, *Ep.* 77, 3.

case of the one this bizarre rhetoric entered into—or, perhaps we may say, constituted—the very essence of their work; they wrote in a true sense for its sake. In the case of the other, it was a mere accident of form, marring the dignity of their presentation indeed, but never concealing the earnestness of their purpose, or destroying the vigor or inherent eloquence of their product. In other words, Latin literature was fast sinking to the level of a mere rhetorical exercise when Christianity entered in with regenerating breath and once more recalled it to serious concernment with the matter of discourse. We may perceive the revolution even in the brutal pages of Arnobius, or perhaps we may more pungently say even in the polished periods of Minucius Felix. We do not need to go beyond Tertullian, however, to observe the whole contrast in its most striking manifestation. We have noted how deeply imbued Tertullian was with the artificial rhetoric of the day. His treatise on *The Manile*, for example, almost outdoes Apuleius himself and has been described as simply “an oratorical debauch in which are prodigally expended all the resources of rhetorical invention.”⁴² Nevertheless, Tertullian never made rhetorical effect his chief object in writing, nor was the machinery of rhetorical artifice, however freely employed, ever permitted to put shackles upon either his thought or his passion. He even speaks shamefacedly of lapses into rhetorical devices as unfitting in the bearers of such a message as Christians had committed to them, and due merely to the exigences of debate. “We rhetoricise, just as we philosophize,” he says, “only on the provocation of the heretics.”⁴³ Despite its frequent artificiality of form, accordingly, his speech remained ever a speech of flame, and before the intense energy of his expression the rhetorical framework continually gives way. It has been justly pointed out⁴⁴ that the Latin language was never carried to a higher pitch of passionate expression, or made the vehicle of a fuller, richer, or more poignant emotional life, than in the hands of this most subjective and individual of all Latin writers. He strains the capacity of the language to the breaking-point in his determination

⁴² Boissier, *L'Afrique romaine*, 259.

⁴³ *De res. carn.*, 5: *ita nos rhetoricari quoque provocant heretici, sicut etiam philosophari.*

⁴⁴ Norden, *Kunstprosa*, Vol. II, pp. 610, 611; cf. Hoppe, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

to give full vent to the intensity of his feelings. With the utmost license he coins new words, imposes new senses upon old ones, crowds Latin forms into Greek idioms, elevates, intensifies the implications of terms and constructions alike—until there emerges from his hands what is really a new tongue, that Christian Latin of which he more than any other single author is the creator.⁴⁵ It was a veritable miracle that he wrought, and we need not wonder that it was not accomplished without some violence and recklessness. In a period of decadence the Latin tongue acquired in the hands of this linguistic genius a power of adaptation in giving expression to ideas hitherto unknown to it, such as it scarcely was able to exhibit in its most flexible period, when Cicero sought to popularize in it the Greek philosophy.⁴⁶

Speaking broadly, Christian literature differentiated itself from the heathen, indeed, precisely as the literature of content from the literature of form. The heathen literature of the time was ruled by the maxim of art for art's sake. The maxim of the Christians was truth for truth's sake. In theory at least, the Christians were ready to carry their distinctive principle, indeed, to absurd extremes. From the first they defended the proposition that a sober and homely dress alone comported with the great truths they had to communicate; and they professed fear lest the meretricious charms of form should distract attention from the tremendous import of the matter. Here too the only suitable adornment seemed to them to be the inner adornment inherent in the beauty of naked truth. It was their constant contention, therefore, as Gregory the Great expresses it in his unmeasured way,⁴⁷ that it were an indecency to straiten the words of the heavenly oracle even under the rules of Donatus. Like the Master himself, they urged, the message should be without form or comeliness. So fanatical a theory, of course, could not be reduced to practice; and they who gave it its most extreme expression, like Gregory the Great himself—whose whole rhetorical form is cast in

⁴⁵ Cf. Harnack, *Chronologie*, Vol. I, p. 667, and Norden in Hinneberg, p. 389. The latter says: "His style is without moderation like his nature; he breaks through the traditional forms instead of adjusting himself to them; but it is just in this that his greatness lies in this sphere too; he was the creator of a Latin ecclesiastical language."

⁴⁶ So Hoppe, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁴⁷ *Moral.*, praef. I.

the Asian mold—were the last to attempt to put it into practice. Men wrote, if they wrote at all, to be read; and to be read they needed to write more or less in accordance with the canons of the art they affected to despise. At first, no doubt, a real simplicity of speech came naturally to the lips of Christians. The writers of the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers are comparatively innocent of conscious rhetorical art,⁴⁸ and the popular sermons, particularly in the West, preserved for a considerable period more or less reminiscence of this early relative stylelessness. But already the Apologists, addressing heathen rather than Christian readers, began inevitably to write more after the fashion in vogue among the heathen. After them the barriers were broken down; and every device known to heathen rhetorical art became the ordinary medium of expression for Christians also. These unmeasured expressions of contempt for form which characterize the whole series of Christian writers must be read, therefore, only as a natural reaction of mind against the equally unmeasured riot of rhetoric which marked the times. And the reaction went only far enough to supply a much-needed corrective of the rage for superficial ornament; and secured only that the matter should not be lost in the form. Its effect was not to separate the Christian from the heathen as a mass of formless writers standing over against the formed. Its effect was only to infuse earnestness of purpose into their literary product, to recall attention from the externals of speech to its burden, and to save Latin literature from rotting down into a mere idle song of an empty day.

Certainly no personality could be imagined better fitted than Tertullian, by training, natural gifts and temperament, to break out the channel for this new literature of substance in the West. In him Chris-

⁴⁸ How important it is to exercise caution in speaking thus even of the New Testament writers may be learned from F. Blass, *Die Rythmen der asianischen und römischen Kunstprosa* (Leipzig, 1905), in which he endeavors to show that not only the Epistle to the Hebrews but the epistles of Paul are written under the rules of the Asian cola (cf. also his *Textkritisches zu den Korintherbriefen* in Schlatter and Lütgerts *Beiträge zur Förderung christl. Theologie*, Vol. X, No. 1 [1906], pp. 51-63; and J. Dräseke, in *Zeitschrift für wissensch. Theologie*, 1906, Vol. I, pp. 133f.). On the other hand, compare the review of Blass by A. Deissmann in the *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, April 16, 1906, No. 8, pp. 231f. (also, more briefly in the *Theolog. Rundschau*, Vol. IX, No. 5 [June, 1906], pp. 227f.).

tian Latin literature attained the summit of its greatness at a leap.⁴⁹ And it was fortunate in the successors which it gave to Tertullian, who worthily carried on the tradition begun by him. For a full century, they were all, like Tertullian, Africans. Until the opening of the fourth century, with the exception of the Greek, Irenaeus, there existed no Christian literature at all in Gaul;⁵⁰ and, with the exception of Novatian (who wrote in the middle of the third century), no Latin Christian literature in Italy. The great Christian writers, in the meantime—Cyprian, the suave ecclesiastic, and Lactantius, the “Christian Cicero”—and the small ones too—Minucius Felix the elegant, Arnobius the inelegant, and Commodian the first Christian poet—were all alike Africans of the Africans. Nor did the scepter depart from Africa when a Christian Latin literature had sprung up elsewhere. Pannonia furnished the first Latin Christian commentator in Victorinus of Petau, and the greatest of all Latin Christian men of letters in Jerome. Gaul in Hilary of Poitiers gave the world a rare theologian. Italy offered in Ambrose the typical ecclesiastical statesman of all time. Spain in Juvenius and Prudentius opened up the stream of Christian Latin poetry. But Africa still held the palm in philosophy in the person of Victorinus, and in Augustine⁵¹ set the capstone on Christian Latin literature as she had laid its foundations in Tertullian. From Tertullian to Augustine—the two hundred years which stretch between constitute the period of African supremacy in Christian Latin letters—the names themselves mark the supremacy of Africa in Christian thought. They are the names of the two greatest forces in western theology; and perhaps we should

⁴⁹ Cf. the somewhat varying estimates of Tertullian by Monceaux and Hoppe. Norden (Hinneberg, p. 38) strikingly says: “Passion which knew no measure is stamped on his nature; hardly any other fanatic has known as he knew how to hate; he almost never spoke in tones of love, that most beautiful fruit of Christianity; therefore we cannot love him, however much we may admire him.”

⁵⁰ Monceaux, *Cyprian*, p. 132.

⁵¹ Norden (Hinneberg, p. 391) appreciatively says: “Yes, we dare to say it, Augustine was the great poet of the ancient church, though, just as little as Plato, does he write in verse. These two belong together as the great poet-philosophers of all time.” Cf. the eulogy of Eucken, *Lebensanschauungen der grossen Denker*, 2d ed., pp. 216 f., beginning: “Augustine is the single great philosopher on the basis of Christianity. All the results of the past and all the suggestions of his own time he takes up into himself in order to create of them something new again.”

omit the qualification "western." What western Christianity is today is largely what Tertullian and Augustine have made it—Tertullian as the initiator, Augustine as the consummator. The whole history of Latin Christian thought runs up to and down from Augustine as its water-shed. All that precedes him was preparation for him; all that follows him only registers the effects of his labors. And Augustine was but the ripe fruitage of African theology. After him the *studium* might well depart to Gaul, as it did, while Africa lay crushed under the heel of the Vandal.⁵² But it carried to Gaul with it only African problems; and the whole history of Christian thought in the West for the next thousand years is determined by the efforts of the church to adjust itself to African Augustinianism—efforts which did not cease until Augustinianism was cast finally out of the old church and created a church for itself in what we know as the Reformation.⁵³

⁵² Cf. Norden, *Kunstprosa*, Vol. II, p. 587.

⁵³ Cf. Harnack, *History of Dogma*, Vol. V, p. 3.